

## BOOK REVIEW

A guide to the dragonflies of Borneo: their identification and biology. By A. G. Orr. Natural History Publications (Borneo), Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia; January 2003; x + 195 pp; hardback. ISBN 983-812-069-3.

Tropical insect faunas have been poorly served by guidebooks, for many reasons. Dr Orr has now written one that provides an excellent model for authors in the future and odonatists are very fortunate to have such a beautiful book. With colour illustrations on almost every page, it is a pleasure to read and to browse. This book is a comprehensive guide to the known species of Borneo and their ecology. There are some 275 named species, 42% of them endemic, and over half of them are illustrated. There are parts of Borneo which have scarcely been explored for dragonflies and there must be a number of species awaiting discovery - this book provides a solid base from which to work.

Introductory chapters outline structure and biology, biogeography and ecology. There are useful hints on collecting, preserving and photography, plus descriptions of the major habitats with appropriate illustrations. A key to the families (adults) is accompanied by explicit diagrams and is followed by a complete checklist of species. Conservation is noted to be more apparent than real, since logging is allowed to go on in National Parks, but it is a start. Much remains to be done, hindered in part by the difficult terrain and lack of access. The most interesting and least known species inhabit montane rainforest - not the easiest place for collecting adults which may hunt at tree-top height, or are thinly scattered.

The main part of the book consists of species accounts arranged by family. Included here are details of life histories and habitat preferences, with advice on species identification. Where this is critical, pointers to the available literature are given. The author has extensive field experience and the accounts benefit greatly from this, being enlivened at times by personal anecdotes and observations. Of particular interest are the chlorocyphid damselflies, which use their spectacular colours to advantage in courtship displays, differing from species to species and comprising dancing, wing flashing and leg dangling (to show white 'gaiters'). Some males may only feed on alternate days. In the case of some Anisoptera, the female has a scoop-shaped tip to the abdomen, with which she collects a drop of water and flicks it, together with her eggs, onto terrestrial substrates such as overhanging leaves. These are just some of many fascinating insights into the life styles here presented.

The book is illustrated throughout with photographs, mostly taken by the author but with contributions from several others, especially M. Hämäläinen, which include close-ups and some larvae. To cap it all off, there is a magnificent portrait gallery of paintings by the author, on 25 plates, representing 115 species of adults and 18 species of larvae. This book will, I suspect, prove irresistible to dragonfly enthusiasts, whether amateur or professional, and will have an appeal far beyond its remit. It is highly recommended.

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